

MEMBERS' FORUM

CHRISTMAS CACTUS "MUTATION"

I have owned a Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera* spp.) for more than four years. A few months ago I noticed an unusual growth that appears to be a mutation, as seen in the photos I attached (see below). Can you tell me if this is normal?

*Maxine Rix
Truckee, California*



This unusual, atypical spine-covered growth formed on the stem of Christmas cactus.



A more typical-looking Christmas cactus pad later developed from the spiny growth.

Editor's response: We forwarded the images and your question to D. Russell Wagner, editor of the *Cactus and Succulent Journal*. According to Wagner, "It is not uncommon for juvenile growth on this type of cactus to exhibit longer spines and more ribs. A Christmas cac-

Member Services

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tus's 'leaves' are actually stems, and like many cacti, they have ribs, but just two! As you can see, the next set of growth on the 'mutated' stem appears to be more like the normal growth. Also, you can readily see that these two ribs have aureoles (the notches on the edges of this plant's stems) from which the spines and flowers, and even leaves form, though the last are often so much reduced in cacti as to be microscopic."

PERENNIAL VEGETABLES ARTICLE INSPIRES HORTICULTURAL THERAPIST

I am a Master Gardener and part-time instructor in a mental health facility that treats recovering addicts. The program these people are in is a court mandated activity in lieu of going to prison. I try to introduce fun, exciting, and healthy activities for these folks to learn, and, in some cases, to take home and teach their children. Learning about good nutrition is a major focus in my lesson planning. Of course, that can tie right into many quick, easy, and fun gardening activities that can be done anywhere.

I'm always looking for new ideas for activities, so I greatly appreciated Eric Toensmeier's article on perennial vegetables in the March/April issue. The article inspired me to start growing plants the people I work with are not used to eating, such as chayote, which I learned to love as a child in New Orleans.

*Rosemary Noel
Bronaugh, Missouri*

FISH EMULSION AND VERTICILLIUM

In the May/June issue you ran a news article about using fish emulsion to suppress verticillium wilt. I planted an eastern redbud tree (*Cercis canadensis*), only to have it die about 10 years later due to this infection. However, I saved seedlings from that tree, and one of them is now eight years old. This year, I noticed that two branches seem to have died over the winter. I have been extremely careful about watering and fertilizing on a regular basis to avoid stressing the tree, but in spite of my efforts, it appears it has become infected. Any information you could give me about using fish emulsion to save my precious tree would be greatly appreciated!

*Diane Koza
Wheaton, Illinois*

Editor's response: We contacted the research team that conducted the initial study and posed your question to them. Here is the response from Pervaiz Abbasi, a research scientist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in London, Ontario: "In our study, which was conducted in a greenhouse setting, fish emulsion prevented verticillium wilt in healthy eggplants. In the case of this eastern redbud, which is already infected with verticillium wilt, I am not sure if fish emulsion will provide any relief. If the gardener has other healthy seedlings, I suggest she plant them in a new pathogen-free location. Prior to planting, the soil in the new location should be treated with fish emulsion according to the label's instructions.

Although the process is still experimental, your reader could also try using fish emulsion to treat the infected tree. Gently loosen the soil around the base of the tree and apply fish emulsion as a drench at the same application rate. I would suggest repeating the application every month or every other month."

PLEASE WRITE US! Address letters to Editor, *The American Gardener*, 7931 East Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, VA 22308. Send e-mails to editor@ahs.org (note Letter to Editor in subject line). Letters we print may be edited for length and clarity.